Peace Among Religions: Hans Küng's Analysis of Christian and Muslim Paradigms of Social Justice in Search of a Global Ethic

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Abstract

This paper is intended to explore theologian Hans Küng's work over the past thirty years to promote world peace by seeking to establish peace between the world's major religions. Peace among religions must start with an exploration of the common ground that already exists between the religions in matters of ethics: the establishment of a "Global Ethic." Küng's argument for the need and the nature of a global ethic required as the minimal starting point of peaceful coexistence between cultures in an age of global awareness will be explored. This will be followed by a focus on Küng's analysis of Christianity and Islam and the contributions that these great prophetic/monotheistic traditions can make to the program of a global ethic and the search for world peace. The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic that was passed by the Parliament of World Religions in September of 1993 based on Küng's work will then be reviewed along with a brief indication of some of the reactions of Christian and Muslim leaders to the document. Implications for Christian and Muslim mutual understanding and dialogue will be explored.

Introduction

The history of the past decade contains many examples of human suffering and conflict that may fairly be laid at the feet of certain religious people and their understanding of how religion plays a role in their lives. From the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States (and similar attacks all over the world since then), to the sexual abuse scandals among clergy, to the initiation and maintenance of war between countries of historically religious character, the nature of the part played by religion in the search for peace and social justice if often viewed as at least ambiguous if not detrimental to many observers. This is nothing new, of course. The long history of religious wars, conquests, schisms and inquisitions has in fact been a scandalous and self-contradictory factor in the decision of many people to reject outright the message of hope held out by the religions or, at best, to only pay lip service to it. This kind of false witness to the power of religion is responsible in a large part for the recent spate of angry neo-atheist authors writing about the delusions of the religious world view. Apart from arguments being made from the basis of a positivistic appeal to a lack of empirical evidence for religious beliefs, many of these authors tend to excoriate religion with a long list of the evils religion has brought into the world (as for example Sam Harris' "Letter to a Christian Nation"). While it might be objected that such listings tend to overlook both the many positive impacts religion has had on human culture (hospitals, universal education, ending slavery and fighting for civil/human rights) and the incomparable history of oppression, torture and genocide that has occurred in many twentieth century experiments in officially atheistic statecraft (Nazism,

Stalinism, etc.), none-the-less, religious history does not often leave room for boasting about a better way of being human or of creating better bonds of community.

And yet, religion can not be avoided in any attempts to pursue peace and social justice among the people of the earth. Religion has failed to disappear as predicted by Marx, Freud, Nietzsche or any of the other Enlightenment theorists who tended to view religion as a crutch that would be thrown away as scientific knowledge progressed. Between just the two major religions we are considering at this conference, more than two billion people continue to orient their lives (at varying degrees of depth and commitment) around the meaning they find in Christ or the Koran. It is precisely because these and other religions appeal to the heart (to the totality of the person in their lived human experience) as well as to the mind that they have such a great influence on how people will actually decide how to live their lives for good or ill. Any attempt to create a program for world peace that fails to recognize the fundamental influence of religion on the lives of those who will be asked to cooperate in such a peace will be missing the chance to integrate the spiritual power necessary to legitimate and sustain the change in consciousness required for true peace.

Hans Küng is a Catholic priest and theologian who has devoted the past thirty years of his very prolific and influential career to these questions about the place of religion and religions in the quest for world peace. In the early part of his career he served as a special advisor to the German cardinals at the second Vatican Council. He went on to become perhaps the most well known theologian of the last half of the twentieth century due to his in depth and best-selling explorations of Christian history and theology, the foundations and rationality for belief in God, the nature of the Church and many other key issues related to Christian belief presented in such a way as to be accessible to serious modern readers outside of the theological faculties. Eventually, the controversies some of his writings stirred up within the Roman Catholic hierarchy led to the withdrawal of Küng's license to teach as a "Catholic" theologian at the University of Tubigen in 1979.[1] In 1980, as a means of settling the legal issues involved in such an action against a tenured faculty member, Küng became the director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research at Tubigen while retaining his status as a theologian.[2]

It was in this capacity that Küng began to explore the possibilities for both ecumenical dialogue (between Christian denominations) and inter-religious dialogue (between Christianity and the other religions of the world, particularly those understood as world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism/Taoism, Judaism and Islam).[3] Through is work at the Institute, dialoging, writing and lecturing with either representatives of the other faiths or Western academic experts in those faiths, Küng gradually began to develop the insight that world peace is

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[1] The complex nature of this controversy is far beyond the scope of this paper to relate. For an in depth presentation of the history as well as the theological and political issues involved, see Hermann Haring, *Hans Küng: Breaking Through* (New York: Continuum, 1998). Also see Küng's two volume autobiography published as *My Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003) and *Disputed Truth* (New York: Continuum, 2008) and also Hans Küng, *What I Believe* (New York: Continuum, 2010).
[2] Haring, p. 237.
[3] See Hans Küng, Josef van Ess, Heinrich von Stietencron, and Heinz Bechert, *Christianity and the World Religions, Paths to Dialogue,* (New York: Orbis, 1993).

dependent upon peace among the religions. In what became his guiding hypothesis for most of his writing for the next twenty-five years, Küng summarized this conviction:

> with the programmed I have formulated for the global change of consciousness which is vital for our survival:
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> No peace among the nations
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> Without peace among the religions.
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> No peace among the religions
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> Without dialogue between the religions.
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> No dialogue between the religions
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> Without investigation of the foundations of the religions.[4]

Based on this program, Küng began to work in two directions. Invited to be an advisor to the first Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago in 1993, Küng first began to investigate the possibility of formulating what he called a "World Ethic" (Weltethos in German): a common set of fundamental values that emerge from all of the religious and even non-religious/humanistic world views that could provide a meaningful moral framework as a minimal set of guidelines for all interactions between cultures. Secondly, due to his conviction that dialogue between religions can only be done on the basis of a thorough understanding of the foundations and history of each of the religions, Küng began an in depth study of the three monotheistic world religions which culminated in the three volumes: *Judaism (1995); Christianity (1995); & Islam (1997).* While Küng recognized the need to go beyond these monotheistic religions to the religions of India and China, he thought the kinship that existed between these three religions suggested a natural starting point in what would probably be a vast project that would go beyond his own contributions.

The tie between these two directions at the end of Küng's career were already evident in the program quoted above: in the modern/post modern world, human survival and the survival of the planet is dependent upon peace being achieved between the nations; peace between the nations can not be accomplished without peace between the religions which, in turn, relies on genuine dialogue in a spirit of respect and leading to mutual understanding between the religions. The in depth investigations into the essence and history of the religions is therefore necessary for a deeper understanding of the original insights contained in the foundations of the faith and the way in which each of the faiths have changed and survived over time.

This paper is intended to explore Küng's work in both of these areas. I will first examine Küng's argument for the need and the nature of a global ethic required as the minimal starting point of peaceful coexistence between cultures in an age of global awareness. Following this, I will focus specifically on Küng's analysis of Christianity and Islam and the way these great

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[4] Hans Küng, *Islam, Past Present & Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), p. xxiii.

prophetic/monotheistic traditions have much to offer the program of a global ethic and the search for world peace. Next I shall briefly give some indication of the reaction of both Christian and Muslim leaders to the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic that was passed by the Parliament of World Religions in September of 1993 based on Küng's work. Finally, I will seek to explore ways in which Muslims and Christians have or may try to work together to promote the goal of world peace and social justice.

Peace Among Religions: The Search for a Global Ethic

The earliest exposition of Küng's argument for the need of a global ethic and his construction of the principles of such an ethic from the basis of the world religions was published in 1991 in the book *Global Responsibility, In Search of a New World Ethic*.[5] Küng divides his analysis into three main sections: the first examines the current world situation, the need for an ethic to guide decision making and the place of religion in the construction of a world ethic. The second explores the issues related to the establishment of a global ethic from the point of view of the religions themselves. Here issues are discussed relating to the possibility of a common ground between religions and how religions may both participate in a common, inter-religious dialogue about the fundamentals of a human ethic without losing their own identity. The question of the unique truth within a religion is explored. Finally, Küng goes on to plan a future program of study of the major religions in anticipation of the need for mutual respect and understanding that is necessarily implied in the concept of inter-religious dialogue. I will look at each of these before moving on to review the actual principles for a global ethic promulgated by the 1993 Parliament of World Religions.

A. The current world situation and the need for a global ethic.
Küng begins his analysis of the current world situation and the need for a global ethic by exploring the impact of events and ideas in the twentieth century that have culminated in a basic paradigm shift from what had been considered modernity to what, for lack of a better term to this point, is called post-modernity. Küng looks back to 1918, the end of World War I, as a watershed year in which many previously held convictions about the benefits of science and technology, about the ongoing progress of humanity toward ever greater achievements of social organization and personal integration would all start to come into doubt. If the Modern world view was characterized by this kind of trust in the overall and continuing progress of humanity out of the previous darkness in which it had lived, the mood of Post-Modernity has been more ambivalent toward the type of future being created through science, technology and mass organization. Küng is not an anti-modernist and he is very clear in stating that modernity has had many positive features. The wonders of modernity have also brought in their wake realities that have threatened the future existence of the human race and to the ecology of the earth itself.

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[5] Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility, In Search of a New World Ethic*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991. Note: Since the first part of this paper follows the argument as presented in this work, it will be abbreviated as GR in future references.

Küng cites a long list of such threats including increasing militarization and its cost, the burden of Third World debt and the growing divide between rich and poor nations, destruction of the rainforests and global warming and, as he said of the time in which he was writing: "during the 1980s, more people were detained, tortured, assassinated, made refugee, or in other ways violated by acts of repressive regimes than at any other time in history…"[6] In post-modern times what often seems to be missing is a sense of how to guide the changes that occur in so many areas of the culture so that they do not end up having a destructive effect in the long run. This point is summarized by Küng in a series of bullets that give examples of the ambiguities that exist in various sectors of modern experience:

- Science, but not wisdom to prevent the misuse of scientific research (why not also envisage the industrial production of human material in Japan?);
- Technology, but no spiritual energy to bring the unforeseeable risks of a highly-efficient macrotechnology under control (why not also work on atomic bombs in India and Pakistan instead of combating the mass poverty?);
- Industry, but no ecology, which might fight against the constantly expanding economy (why not cut down tropical rain forest in Brazil by the square kilometre?);
- Democracy, but no morality which could work against the massive interests of various individuals and groups in power (what can one do against the drug cartel in Colombia, the scandal in the Indian Congress Party, the corruption in the Japanese National Liberal Party or the Mobutus in Zaire?).[7]

While some of the references in this quotation are now dated, it would not be hard to substitute other examples of corruption and other threatening uses of technology in more recent times. It is this recognition of these post-modern quandaries that begin to lead Küng to his formulation of why a global ethic is needed. In the face of these kinds of threats posed by the unforeseeable effects of innovation, Küng states that a global ethic is required as a prophylactic for future crises:

> Ethics has usually come too late, as it is reflection on the morality of human behavior. Too often people have asked what we may do only after we have been able to do it. But for the future the decisive thing is that we should know what we may do before we can do it and do indeed do it…ethics should be a prophylactic for crises. Leading ethicists now agree that we need a preventive ethics. And this should not just begin with industrial production, but already at the stage of experimentation (which has extremely serious consequences in both atomic technology and gene technology), indeed even at the stage of scientific and theoretical reflection, with its priorities and preferences.[8]

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[6] Hans Küng, *GR,* p.2.
[7] ibid., p. 12.
[8] Hans Küng, *GR*, p. 15.

One reason for a global ethic, therefore, is this need to anticipate the impact that technological or scientific innovation will have on human life. A global ethic must be in place, accepted and even enforced by all people and cultures as a basis upon which such "scientific and theoretical reflection" may take place in advance of doing what we may do.

Küng goes on then to explore at length the question of why ethics should be a question of concern: why anyone should be ethical, why anyone should do good and not do evil. This is something of a rhetorical question for Küng at this point as he simply points out the difficulty of understanding the foundations of an ethical stance. Ultimately this leads him to the question of the place of religion in a global ethic to which will be considered shortly. However, as a way of beginning to answer the question of why anyone should be ethical, Küng suggests three motivations for an ethical consensus as he addresses the need for both believers and non-believers to cooperate with each other in this matter

1. The danger of a vacuum of meaning, values and norms threatens both believers and unbelievers. Together we must counter the loss of the old traditions and authorities which provided orientation and the quite fatal crisis in orientation which ensues.

2. A democracy without a prelegal consensus finds itself in difficulties over legitimation. Certainly the free democratic state must be neutral in its world-view, but it needs a minimal basic consensus in respect of particular values, norms and attitudes, because without this basic moral consensus a society worth living in is impossible. It follows from that:

3. There can be no survival for human society without ethics; to be specific, there can be no internal peace without an agreement to solve social conflicts without violence.

There can be no economic or legal order without the will to observe a particular order and particular laws.

There can be no institutions without at least the tacit consent of the citizens concerned.[9]

If such a consensus is possible for believers and non-believers as Küng believes it is, that very possibility would suggest that perhaps no reference to religion need be made at all. What role does religion play, therefore in the creation of a global ethic? To answer this Küng first explores the possibility for grounding ethics in some other way than religion. Science and technology in and of themselves are value neutral and, as such are not able to provide the guidance necessary for making decisions about what may be allowed to be done. The history of the misuse of science in human research is enough to suggest that science does not show the way in terms of ethical decision making. Nor does science provide any motivation for ethical behavior: why someone should do something that is not in their own self-interest, for example. Likewise, philosophy has also seems incapable of providing a foundation for ethics that can be

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[9] Hans Küng, *GR,* p. 39.

binding for all people at all time. Philosophy often ends up retreating into the ethics of the particular community (virtues derived from a particular community's world view) or is forced to adopt either an idealistic transcendental approach (what a perfect world or society with perfect institutions would be like) or a utilitarian/pragmatic approach (whatever works best at this point). The difficulty with these approaches is that "they remain abstract and optional–and not just for the average person. Despite their claim to a transcendental 'ultimate binding quality' they do not seem to point to any universally obvious and unconditional obligation. Why should I do that unconditionally, and why should I in particular do it?"[10] In addition, philosophy is not able to deal very well with ethical situations that call for self-sacrifice: "philosophical models easily fail precisely at the point where an action is required of human beings in a specific instance…which is in no way to their advantage, which in no way serves their happiness or any communication, but rather can require of them an action against their interests, a 'sacrifice' which in an extreme case can even call for the sacrifice of their life."[11]

It is at this point that Küng begins to consider the possibility that the religions of the world may have a role to play that neither science nor philosophy can fill. This does not mean that people who do not live within the framework of a religious faith are not able to live morally upstanding lives. They obviously are and do. However, as Küng points out now after having surveyed the limitations of science and philosophy: "even if in fact they want to accept unconditional moral norms for themselves: they cannot give a reason for the absoluteness and universality of ethical obligation. What remains uncertain is why I should follow such norms unconditionally, i.e. in every case and everywhere–even where they run quite contrary to my own interest. And why should everyone do this? For what is an ethic worth in the last resort if it is not observed by everyone…" and ultimately, for Küng, "…[an] unconditional claim, a 'categorical' ought, cannot be derived from the finite conditions of human existence." [12]

Religion enters here because, for those who have taken the reasonable trusting step of orienting their lives around the vision/world view of one of the world religions which, taking all of them into account would include the vast majority of the human population, religion is able to provide the unconditional grounding for ethical decision making that is binding because religions themselves are grounded in faith in that which goes beyond the conditional human situation, "an Absolute which can provide an over-arching meaning and which embraces and permeates individual, human nature and indeed the whole of human society."[13] It is the unconditional experience of Absolute reality that may enable and empower followers of a religion (to the extent they have allowed the vision of the particular religion to permeate their lives as a fundamental meaning system) to place their lives and sufferings in a larger context of meaning, a larger horizon of history, and to make the kind of self-denying, self-sacrificing decisions that can

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[10] Hans Küng, *GR*, p. 43.
[11] Ibid. Küng also briefly notes here that, failing to find a system of ethical orientation in either science/technology or philosophy, many people will try to put their own system together, often turning to pseudo-religious devices such as astrology. Besides the difficulty of the obviously mythical nature of these approaches, they tend to focus on the individual level and ignore the larger political and corporate levels of those threats facing human survival.
[12] Hans Küng, *GR*, p. 52.
[13] Ibid., p. 53

not be grounded otherwise. And contrary to those who would claim that his represents some form of alien control of humanity in which humanity is no longer free, Küng specifies that:

> On the contrary: such grounding, anchorage and direction open up the possibility for true human selfhood and action; they make it possible to frame rules for oneself and to accept personal responsibility. So, properly understood, theonomy is not heteronomy, but the ground, the guarantee and also the limit of human autonomy, which may never deteriorate into human arbitrariness. *Only a bond to an infinite offers freedom in the face of all that is finite* [emphasis is mine]."[14]

As such, religion opens up possibilities for a society that cut across all social, economic or intellectual distinctions. Küng summarizes these possibilities in a fourfold presentation of the function of religion and, by so doing, indicates the need to have religion remain a part of the dialogue about a global ethic:

- Religion can communicate a specific depth-dimension, an all-embracing horizon of meaning, even in the face of suffering, injustice, guilt and meaninglessness, and also a last meaning of life even in the face of death: the whither and whence of our being.
- Religion can guarantee supreme values, unconditional norms, the deepest motivations and the highest ideals: the why and wherefore of our responsibility.
- Through common symbols, rituals, experiences and goals, religion can create a sense of feeling at home, a sense of trust, faith, certainty, strength for the self, security and hope: a spiritual community and allegiance.
- Religion can give grounds for protest and resistance against unjust conditions: the longing for the 'wholly Other' which is already now at work and which cannot be stilled.[15]

Having established the place for religion at the table in a post-modern search for a global ethic, acknowledges some would still say that we are begging the question about the place of religious ethical systems in that there seem to be so many differences in what the various religious systems call for there adherents to do. When one thinks of all of the prescriptions relating to dress, hygiene, food, prayer, holy days, fasting, etc., all of which one way or another are presented as the way to live or to do things properly, i.e. how to behave, how could one ever expect that these systems could be harmonized into a global ethic? While all of these distinctions may be true, Küng goes on to claim that there exists a common strata of ideals and fundamental attitudes to which all great religious traditions adhere and which may begin to form the basis of a common global ethic. These are distilled by Küng into a framework of six categories:

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 54.

1. A consistent concern for human well being: by citing examples in each of the major world religions of how each consistently calls for reducing suffering, loving the neighbor, striving for justice and doing good to the poor and outcasts, Küng makes the point that "human wellbeing and dignity as the basic principle and goal of human ethics is brought out with unconditional authority–in a way in which only the religions can and may do it…Human dignity, human freedom and human rights can thus not only be stated in positivistic terms, but also be given a basis in an ultimate depth, a religious basis."[16]

2. Provision of Norms for basic human behavior: It is possible to discern underneath all of the differences in religions certain basic standards to guide behavior. Specifically, Küng gives the examples of prohibitions on killing, lying, stealing and immorality as well as the positive requirement to love and honor parents and children. There is a need here to steer between the calcification of these norms into a hardened legalism on the one hand and yet to not give way to a situational ethics that only looks to the immediate consequences. If these norms are taken as guides to action and considered within the concrete situation: this "means that our 'ought' is always related to the situation, but in a particular situation the 'ought' can become categorical, without ifs and buts. So in any concrete moral decision the universal normative constant is to be bound up with the particular variables which are conditioned by the situation."[17]

3. Espousing the ideal of a Middle Way between ethical extremes: each of the major religions may be said to encourage an approach to living and ethical extremes that represents the kind of sanity available in the Golden Mean of the Greek philosophers. As examples, Küng indicates "there is a middle way between greed and contempt for possessions, hedonism and asceticism, sensuality and hostility to the senses, succumbing to the world and denying it."[18] In the religions the middle way is often presented as a way of life to be cultivated through the practice of virtues, habits of the heart, that gradually enable those who are developing them to make the right decisions despite changing circumstances.

4. Promotion of some form of 'The Golden Rule': each of the religions specifies some version of the kind of supreme norm that is expected to hold for all people at all times regardless of the situation. This is usually stated in either the positive or negative form of the golden rule (positive = 'do to others what you would have them do to you;' negative: do not do to others what you would not have them do to you). The important point in this for Küng is the unconditional nature of this kind of supreme norm: "a norm which is not just hypothetical and conditioned but is categorical, apodeictic and unconditioned–utterly practicable in the face of the extremely complex situation in which the individual or groups must often act."[19]

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[16] Ibid., p.56.
[17] Ibid., p. 57.
[18] Ibid., p. 58.
[19] Ibid., p. 59.

5. Offering genuine inspiration and motivation for living a moral life: Here Küng has in mind the possibility that religion creates of offering real lived examples of people who have lived out a new kind of life inspired by the vision of the particular religion. Such examples go beyond philosophical arguments for rational behavior by showing in concrete life circumstances the possibilities for new levels of human existence. Whether it is the lives of the founders of the religions (Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, etc.) or those who followed afterwards in deep commitment to ideals of the founder, such figures are able to inspire moral behavior and virtuous lifestyles in many followers.

6. Offering a meaning system and a sense of a final goal to those struggling in an atmosphere of meaninglessness: speaking specifically about the horizon of meaning offered in the religions and summarized in such terms as resurrection, paradise, nirvana, eternal life, etc., Küng concludes that "in the face of many frustrations and many experiences of suffering and failure, religions can help to lead people on by offering meaning beyond death and giving meaning here and now, not least where moral action has remained unsuccessful."[20] One would only have to think of the long struggles for civil rights in India under British rule, in the United States under segregation, and in South Africa under apartheid just to name a few examples of long standing oppressive situations in which moral action remained unsuccessful and yet people continued to work for freedom.

With these first indications of the role religion may play in underwriting a global ethic, Küng moves on to discuss in detail some general concerns that are posed by the possibility of inter-religious dialogue such as the concept of truth in religion (or, more exactly, the idea of one true religion) and the idea of remaining steadfast to the truth of one's own religion while at the same time remaining open to truth (and, therefore, open to dialogue) in other religions. Küng provides very important insights here into how genuine inter-religious dialogue may take place, however, to explore these insights in detail would be to go beyond the scope of this paper. At this point, therefore, the analysis here will move on to consider the first attempt to codify and promulgate the principles of a global ethic based on the groundwork laid by Küng in *Global Responsibility*.

In September of 1993 the second Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago, passed a resolution entitled *Declaration toward a Global Ethic* which was "drafted in large measure by Hans Küng."[21] The significance of this statement is indicated by Küng in his introduction to *Yes to a Global Ethic*, a book which he edited which included the text of the Declaration as well as response from political and religious leaders from around the world. In that introduction, Küng states that the importance of the document lies in the fact that "people of very different religious backgrounds for the first time agreed on a minimum of irrevocable

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[20] Ibid., p. 60.
[21] Hans Kung (ed.), *Yes to a Global Ethic, Voices from Religion and Politics*, New York: Continuum, 1996, back cover.

directives which they were already affirming in their own traditions."[22] In clarifying the intent of the Declaration, he is careful to state what it is not meant to do as well as what it is meant to be:

> From the beginning, it was clear that a global ethic does not mean a new global ideology, or even an attempt to arrive at one uniform religion. The call for a global ethic does not aim to replace the supreme ethical demands of each individual religion with an ethical minimalism…Nor does [it] aim to invent a new morality and then impose it on the various religions from outside (and even from the 'West'). It simply aims to make known what religions in West and East, North and South already hold in common…In short, the 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic' seeks to emphasize the minimal ethic which is absolutely necessary for human survival. It is not directed against anyone, but invites all, believers and also non-believers, to adopt this ethic and live in accordance with it.[23]

The Declaration is made up of four major sections. Originally an Introduction which was tended to be a brief, evocative presentation of the larger Declaration was issued as well for the sake of public proclamation. The first part of the actual Declaration sets for the need for a Global Ethic which follows along the lines of Küng's argument about the current, post-modern world situation that has been already discussed. The final part of the Declaration is a brief epilogue that calls for all people of the world to accept and implement the Global Ethic by means of a transformation of consciousness. The substance of the Declaration is contained in Parts II and III which will be reviewed here.

Part II stands as a kind of focal point for the whole Declaration in that it seeks to summarize as succinctly as possible what the innermost value or basic ethical demand that all religious traditions hold in common. It does this by stating three broad principles that are thought to be universal and binding obligations:

1. **"Every human being must be treated humanely."** In the light of the terrible history of how inhumanely human beings have been treated, this is a declaration of the fundamental dignity of all human persons that always has priority over other ends or means.

2. **"[D]o good and avoid evil."** This obligation applies to all people at all times whether as individuals or in groups: no one is ever to think that they have passed beyond normal moral rules and or that their cause justifies the maltreatment of human beings. As the Declaration states: "No one stands 'above good and evil'- no human being, no social class, no influential interest group, no cartel, no police apparatus, no army and no state."

3. **"What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others! Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others!"** Rather than allowing the two previous principles to be lost around questions of definition (what does 'humanely' or 'good' or 'evil' mean?), this last principle is offered as "the

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[22] Ibid., p. 2.
[23] Ibid.

irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions."[24]

Part III of the Declaration then sets up what are called "*four broad, ancient guidelines* for human behaviour which are found in most of the religions of the world."[25] In each case, the guideline for behavior is stated and followed by both a positive and a negative statement of a 'directive' from ancient religious or ethical traditions. Take together, these guidelines and directives fill out the substance of the Global Ethic and provide specific forms of human behavior that are to be avoided. At the same time they remain broad enough to cover many different ethical situations. As mentioned earlier, they are not intended to substitute for more specific or detailed ethical guidelines within each of the religions or to create a new form of universal ethical religion, but to emphasize the great agreement that already exists among the religions of the world in terms of minimum standards of human conduct.

1. Guideline: "*Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.*" This commitment refers to the directive (put in the negative) "You shall not kill!" or (put positively) "Have respect for life!" The Declaration goes on:

> all people have a right to life, safety, and the free development of personality in so far as they do not injure the rights of others. No one has the right physically or psychically to torture, injure, much less kill, any other human being. And no people, no state, no race, no religion has the right to hate, to discriminate against, to 'cleanse', to exile, much less to liquidate a 'foreign' minority which is different in behaviour or holds different beliefs.[26]

2. Guideline: *Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order*. This commitment refers to the directive (negative) "You shall not steal!" or (positive) "Deal honestly and fairly!" The Declaration goes on:

> No one has the right to rob or dispossess in any way whatsoever any other person or the commonweal. Further, no one has the right to use her or his possessions without concern for the needs of society and Earth.[27]

3. Guideline: *Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness*. This commitment refers to the directive (negative) "You shall not lie!" or (positive) "Speak and act truthfully!" The Declaration goes on:

> No woman or man, no institution, no state or church or religious community has the right to speak lies to other humans…This is especially true:

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[24] See "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic," in Hans Kung (ed.), *Yes to a Global Ethic, Voices from Religion and Politics.* New York: Continuum, 1996, pp. 16-17.
[25] Ibid., p. 17.
[26] Ibid., p. 18.
[27] Ibid., p. 20.

- For those who work in the *mass media,* to whom we entrust the freedom to report for the sake of truth and to whom we thus grant the office of guardian…
- For *artists, writers, and scientists,* to whom we entrust artistic and academic freedom…
- For the *leaders of countries, politicians, and political parties* to whom we entrust our own freedoms.
- Finally, for *representatives of religion.* When they stir up prejudice, hatred, and enmity towards those of different belief, or even incite or legitimate religious wars, they deserve the condemnation of humankind and the loss of their adherents.[28]

4. Guideline: *Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.* This commitment refers to the directive (negative) "You shall not commit sexual immorality!" or (positive) "Respect and love one another!" The Declaration goes on:

> No one has the right to degrade others to mere sex objects, to lead them into or hold them in sexual dependency…The relationship between women and men should be characterized not by patronizing behaviour or exploitation, but by love, partnership, and trustworthiness. Human fulfillment is not identical with sexual pleasure. Sexuality should express and reinforce a loving relationship lived by equal partners.[29]

This represents only a brief overview of the key points of the Declaration. Each of these four sections as well as the other parts of the Declaration contain many more aspects to be considered including statements on the current condition of the world, the way ethical principles should be taught to children at home and what it means to be authentically human according to the great religious traditions. While the limits of this paper preclude going into each of these areas, what is presented here summarizes the way in which Küng's original vision as presented in *Global Responsibility* came to be defined as a concrete articulation of a Global Ethic. The question remains, however, as to how Küng sees the specific contributions of Christianity and Islam in the creation of a global ethic. To that we now turn

Christian and Muslim Paradigms: Contributions to a Global Ethic
As may be recalled, the final part of Küng's programmatic statement quoted above states that there can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions and there can be no dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions. In the third part of *Global Responsibility,* Küng lays out a strategy for research and writing that he intended to pursue from that point (1991) forward that would, in effect, provide at least a start on

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[28] Ibid., pp. 22-23.
[29] Ibid. p. 24.

this final task of investigating the foundations of the religions. Since that time, starting with the three prophetic religions of middle-eastern origin, Küng has published in three individual volumes (each running almost 1,000 pages) massive studies of the history, ideas and faith-life of *Judaism* (published in English in 1992), *Christianity* (1995) and *Islam* (2007). Using Thomas Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm changes' developed to speak of epochal shifts in understanding and outlook that have occurred in science, Küng has been able to trace the way in which the outlook and practice of the three religions have changed over time from the founding paradigm of the earliest community of faith. In each case, a dynamic of accretions can be observed as layer upon layer of new ways of expressing the faith were laid down over the original faith experience as the religions encountered new cultures and new cultural challenges.

The result of all of this work has been to place Küng in a very unique position to understand how the three religions have grown along side of each other, interacted with each other, how they are similar to each other in many ways, and how they have disagreed and quarreled (or worse) with each other often due to misunderstanding each others intentions or ideas. The work has also enabled Küng to see those aspects of the three religions that lend themselves to the goal of inter-religious peace and the achievement of a global ethic. This is not a rose-colored glasses approach. Along with point out what each faith has to offer in this enterprise he equally takes each faith to task in areas where they have not been consistent in their history and behavior with the goals of their founders or the heart of the faith. While those critiques may not be explored here, they provide a balanced critique that could serve the process of inter-religious dialogue by enabling the process of self-criticism on the part of each of the religions that would be a necessary part of that dialogue. Rather, the focus here will be on Küng's ideas of the strengths each faith (Islam and Christianity for the sake of this discussion) brings to the effort to establish a Global Ethic.

Before considering the contributions of Islam and Christianity separately, we should note that throughout his writings on both faiths Küng establishes the parallels of the one to the other in many areas, particularly in the area of ethic. His most direct presentation of that (involving all three prophetic faiths) is a side by side comparison between the Decalogue that guides both the Jewish and the Christian Faiths (Exodus 20: 1-21) and the Code of Duties of Islam (Surah 17.22-38).[30] When compared this way the basic codes of ethics of the three faiths seem to harmonize very well and also provide the foundation for the four guidelines of the Declaration toward a Global Ethic as described above. This along with all the other elements of kinship between these three faiths (belief and trust in the same God of Abraham, the same view of history as a movement toward a goal in which God saves his people, the same sense of the sacredness of human life due to God's special care for humans, as well as the same sense that human beings are accountable to God for the lives they have led and how they have treated other human beings) all make for a rich compatibility that would assist inter-religious dialogue. However, this

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[30] See chart where this comparison is made in Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present and Future.* Oxford: Oneworld Publishing, 2007, p. 93.

analysis will now consider how Küng does see the unique contributions of each of the two faiths we are considering, first with Islam and then with Christianity.

Islam

In *Islam, Past, Present and Future*, Küng summarizes his findings that Islam contains those same essential elements presented in the Declaration toward a Global Ethic by giving examples of how each Guideline is supported by the Qur'an or the hadith:

> A culture of non-violence and respect for life:
>
> 'Have respect for life'–'You shall not kill', torture, torment, violate! Respect for life, for all life, is deeply rooted in Islamic ethics. The Qur'an says that the killing of an innocent person is equivalent to killing the whole of humankind and the Prophet's concern for the animals and for nature emerges from the hadith. (surah 5.32)
>
> A culture of solidarity and a just economic order:
>
> 'Deal honestly and fairly'–'You shall not steal', exploit, bribe, corrupt.
>
> For the ethic of the Qur'an, justice is so central that only a just person can be a right believer. 'O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anything lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious.' An unjust social order cannot be an Islamic order. The Qur'an requires that the surpluses beyond actual need shall be distributed to the needy and poor. Mandatory almsgiving, the zakat, is one of the five pillars of Islam. (surah 5.8)
>
> A culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness:
>
> 'Speak and act truthfully'—'You shall not lie', deceive, falsify, manipulate.
>
> The ethic of the Qur'an is essentially grounded in faithfulness to the truth. Truth (*haqq*) is one of the names of God and as central a value in Islam as justice. A just social order cannot be realized without truthfulness as a fundamental postulate.
>
> A culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women:
>
> 'Respect and love one another': 'Do not abuse sexuality', do not deceive, humiliate, dishonour.
>
> In principle, the Qur'an gives women and men the same status: 'The rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husband's] rights with regard to them, although men have precedence over them [in this respect].' (surah 2.228)

The golden rule of mutuality has been handed down in the Sunnah; 'None of you is a believer as long as he does not wish for his brother what he wishes for himself.' (40 Hadith of an-Nawawi, no. 13) [31]

Christianity

When Küng wrote the second volume in the series on the foundations of the three prophetic religions, *Christianity*, he had intended to write a second volume of that work which would probably provided the same kind of parallel assessment of how the precepts of Christianity matched up with the four guidelines of the Declaration. That second volume never came out, however, as Küng moved on to his study of Islam and to other works about Christianity or the Roman Catholic Church. As far back however as the writing of *Global Responsibility*, Küng had begun to sketch out his ideas of how Christianity may have a unique perspective that could contribute to the work of creating the Global Ethic. In *Global Responsibility* he devotes a small section of the book to what he entitles 'Specific Christian Contributions'. He sees a special place for the contribution of Christianity here not because he is a Christian theologian, but because Christianity has been "more ravaged than other religions by the movement of secularization but also more challenged by it…"[32] This statement is undoubtedly true given the interaction of the Enlightenment with the world view of Christianity. It has been the pressure on Christianity in its struggle to understand and assimilate the new challenges of science, human rights and secularization that have led it to a process of self-reflection that can assist the conceptualization of a World Ethic. Küng focuses as an example on a document produced by a European assembly of Christian churches in Basle in 1989 for a program dedicated to 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.'[33] The conclusions of this assembly were of particular importance toward the furtherance of inter-religious dialogue (inter-denominational in this case) according to Küng for two reasons. The first was that "the Basle assembly did not just preach to the world in a self-righteous way, but first exercised self-criticism on the church. The Christian churches have become aware of their own failings in the past."[34] He provides the text of these self-criticisms that include admissions of failures in many areas including failure to witness to God's love, failure to seek peace, abuse of power and failure to overcome divisions in the church, failure to question unjust social and economic structures, and failure to bear witness to the sanctity of human life among others. This example of self-critical self-reflection for Küng is a vital starting point for any form of religious dialogue: if the religions are ever going to have a worthwhile sharing of their faith perspectives they must first be willing to lay aside their historical stances of superiority and to be willing to own up to their own failings. It is, in a sense, an attempt to remove the log from one's own eye before removing the speck from the eye of another.

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[31] See Hans Kung, *Islam*, p. 657.
[32] Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility*, p.63.
[33] Ibid., p. 65.
[34] Ibid.

The second reason Küng holds up the document from the Basle assembly as a model for the work of a Global Ethic is that it represents a model approach in a post-modern framework. He expresses this by referring to the need to for the human community to move beyond the ideal of the French revolution that sparked the Modern period: " 'freedom, equality and brotherhood'– which are often misunderstood in individualistic terms and practiced in a one-sided way–are no longer enough. In the postmodern period they in particular need the dialectical counterpoint, the supplementation and 'sublation' which I would like to attempt here…"[35]   What follows is Küng's 'dialectical adaptation of the principles espoused by the Basle assembly:

> *(a) Not just freedom, but also justice*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a society in which men and women possess equal rights and live in solidarity with one another…
>
> *(b) Not just equality, but also plurality*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a reconciled multiplicity of cultures, traditions and peoples in Europe…
>
> *(c) Not just brotherhood, but also sisterhood*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a renewed community of men and women in church and society in which women bear an equal share of responsibility to men at all levels and in which they can freely contribute their gifts, insights, values and experiences…
>
> *(d) Not just coexistence, but peace*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a society in which peacemaking and the peaceful resolution of conflicts is supported, and to a community of peoples which contribute in solidarity to the wellbeing of others…
>
> *(e) Not just productivity, but solidarity with the environment*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a community of human beings with all creatures, in which their rights and integrity are also respected…
>
> *(f) Not just toleration, but ecumenism*
> For the next millennium a way must be found to a society which is conscious that it needs constant forgiveness and renewal, and which together thanks and praises God for his love and for his gifts…[36]

As previously in some of the material cited above, each of these six dialectical assertions includes more details following what is quoted here that enriches the meaning of the point being

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[35] Ibid., p.67
[36] Ibid., pp. 67-69.

made but is more than can be made available here. It is obvious, however, how well these assertions line up with the guidelines and directives that later formed the basis of the Declaration toward a Global Ethic and why Küng looks to this example coming out of Christianity as a model for the future work of trying to achieve that Ethic.

Conclusion: What are the possibilities for Christian and Islamic contributions to achieving a Global Ethic and towards advancing social justice and peace?

In concluding this paper, it is well worthwhile to recognize that the work of achieving a Global Ethic that began with the second Parliament of the Religions and the Declaration toward a Global Ethic in 1993 continues to go on. Hans Küng in particular has, as indicated earlier, worked tirelessly to investigate the foundations of the three Abrahamic religions and to promote the cause of the Global Ethic. He is president of the Global Ethic Foundation and continues to write and lecture around the world on this area. The Foundation itself, while still headquartered in Tübingen, has branched out to sites all over the world according its website www.weltethos.org. The website provides many resources for those who are interested in contributing to the dissemination of the Global Ethic.

It should be noted also that there have been many responses to the Declaration toward a Global Ethic from a variety of representatives of the world religions as well as members of the political, economic and academic communities. These responses have been published in various formats and are available on the web site. The responses from the religious leaders are usually very supportive and yet nuanced in their reactions to the details of the Declaration. One fairly common concern is that, in trying so hard to achieve a 'least common denominator' for a Global Ethic, Küng and those who drafted the declaration may have moved too far away from the need for faith or a lived faith life itself which is often seen by the religions as necessary for a believer to live out the demands of justice or, in this case, a Global Ethic.[37]

While there may be validity to this and other criticisms, it should be remembered that the task undertaken in this project has been monumental and, given the long and sad history of human violence, oppression, wars, poverty and other ways of making humans suffer, some of which the religions incited, encouraged or tolerated, has been greatly overdue. The whole reason driving this search for a Global Ethic is to provide a starting place for further growth in mutual understanding and appreciation while guaranteeing a minimal expectation of what might be required of humans by the human community.

For Christians and Muslims in particular, it would seem that there is much room and much need for this kind of dialogue to come to a better mutual understanding and appreciation as demonstrated in Küng's review of the foundations of each faith. Starting this process of dialogue from the point of view of a Global Ethic or from the mutual concern for social justice and the promotion of peace seems like a particularly important place to begin because it allows the dialogue to occur between the two faiths at many levels. Such a dialogue does not depend on

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[37] See Hans Kung, *Yes to a Global Ethic*, for example the response by Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, the former archbishop of Chicago, pp. 140-143. Some of the respondents from Islam had similar concerns.

participants having an in depth knowledge of the theological/legal history or teachings of each faith, i.e. a dialogue between experts. Concern for social justice, peace and ethics can take place at the local level among people of faith or no faith who recognize the suffering of the poor and the unjust social structures that separate people from one another. Such a dialogue about ethics in particular could lead to Muslim and Christian university or high school students, for example, to a better appreciation of how similar their goals are in terms of serving the poor and making a difference in the world. Even if it only enhanced the basic ethical awareness and commitment in the lives of those who participated in these 'local level' discussions, even at the relatively basic level proposed in the Declaration of not stealing, not lying, not taking advantage of another person, treating others as you want to be treated, this in itself would be a great accomplishment.

The final summary may be left to Küng:

It is probable that consciousness of our global responsibility for the future of humankind has never been so great as it is now. Abstinence in matters of ethics is no longer possible.

It has become abundantly clear why we need a global ethic. For there can be no survival without a world ethic.[38]

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[38] Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility*, p. 69.